

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY MAY 4, 2011

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY APRIL 11, 2011

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE—2011–12 REGULAR SESSION

## ASSEMBLY BILL

**No. 1209**

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### **Introduced by Assembly Members Cook and Pan**

(Principal coauthor: Senator Correa)

(Coauthors: Assembly Members *Allen, Atkins, Beall, Bill Berryhill, Block, Bonilla, Buchanan, Butler, Conway, Donnelly, Fletcher, Garrick, Grove, Halderman, Jeffries, Knight, Logue, Ma, Morrell, Nestande, Nielsen, V. Manuel Pérez, Silva, Valadao, and Wagner*)

(Coauthors: Senators Berryhill, Calderon, Harman, La Malfa, Lieu, Rubio, and Runner)

February 18, 2011

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An act to add Section 972.3 to the Military and Veterans Code, relating to veterans, and making an appropriation therefor.

#### LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1209, as amended, Cook. Department of Veterans Affairs: veterans' services.

Existing law establishes the Department of Veterans Affairs, which is responsible for administering various programs and services for the benefit of veterans.

This bill would appropriate the sum of \$7,300,000 from the General Fund to the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide for specified veterans' services.

Vote:  $\frac{2}{3}$ . Appropriation: yes. Fiscal committee: yes.  
State-mandated local program: no.

*The people of the State of California do enact as follows:*

1     SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares all of the  
2 following:

3     (a) The current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are creating  
4 an entirely new generation of veterans who may be eligible for  
5 federal benefits because of their war service and their physical and  
6 mental condition. Californians make up to 10 percent of the  
7 military forces being used in these conflicts.

8     (b) The California National Guard, as well as reserve forces in  
9 California, are providing significant force levels to these wars.

10    (c) Most of these returning California veterans are not aware of  
11 the federal and state benefits that are available to them.

12    (d) Additionally, it is estimated that in California there may be  
13 over two million veterans and their widows or widowers, who are  
14 unaware that they may be eligible for pensions from the federal  
15 government based upon their past military service in World War  
16 II, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, or the current conflicts in the  
17 Middle East.

18    (e) In 1997, the Legislature passed and the Governor signed  
19 Senate Bill 608, enacted as Chapter 318 of the Statutes of 1997,  
20 that amended Section 972.1 of the Military and Veterans Code.  
21 ~~Chapter 318~~ *Senate Bill 608* requires the Department of Veterans  
22 Affairs to annually determine the amount of new or increased  
23 monetary benefits paid to eligible veterans by the federal  
24 government that were attributable to the assistance of county  
25 veterans service officers and requires the Department of Finance  
26 to consider an increase in the annual budget for county veterans  
27 service officers, in an amount not to exceed five million dollars  
28 (\$5,000,000), if justified.

29    (f) In 1997, through the efforts of county veterans service  
30 officers, new or increased federal veterans' benefits had risen to  
31 eighty-eight million dollars (\$88,000,000). From 1997 until 2006,  
32 these new and increased federal veterans' benefits had risen to  
33 over one hundred seventy-seven million dollars (\$177,000,000)  
34 as a result of the State of California providing annual subvention  
35 funding to county veterans service officers of up to two million  
36 three hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$2,350,000).

37    (g) From 2007 until 2010, the annual subvention was increased  
38 to two million six hundred thousand dollars (\$2,600,000), and by

1 2010, the annual federal benefits attributable to county veterans  
2 service officers had risen to three hundred five million dollars  
3 (\$305,000,000).

4 (h) In 2009, the Legislature passed and the Governor signed  
5 Senate Bill 419, enacted as Chapter 183 of the Statutes of 2009  
6 that amended Section 972.1 of the Military and Veterans Code.  
7 ~~Chapter 318~~ *Senate Bill 419* found and declared that 50 percent  
8 of the amount annually budgeted for county veterans service  
9 officers is approximately eleven million dollars (\$11,000,000).  
10 The Legislature further found and declared that it is an efficient  
11 and reasonable use of state funds to increase the annual budget for  
12 county veterans service officers in an amount not to exceed eleven  
13 million dollars (\$11,000,000) if it is justified by the monetary  
14 benefits to the state's veterans attributable to the effort of these  
15 officers.

16 (i) County veterans service officers provide valuable services  
17 to California's veterans and to the state and its counties by assisting  
18 veterans in obtaining federal and state benefits to which the  
19 veterans are entitled.

20 (j) County veterans service officers also contribute to increased  
21 revenues and significant cost avoidance for the state and its  
22 counties far in excess of the amount of state general funding  
23 provided to them.

24 (k) Since 1995, at a cost to the state of thirty-three million  
25 dollars (\$33,000,000) from the General Fund, the county veterans  
26 service officers have obtained two billion nine hundred  
27 seventy-eight million dollars (\$2,978,000,000) in federal veterans  
28 benefits for California veterans and their dependents, thereby  
29 garnering the state an 88-fold increase on its investment.

30 (l) In 2010, the Governor implemented, and the Legislature  
31 approved, Operation Welcome Home, a statewide campaign to  
32 connect with every returning veteran to determine his or her needs  
33 and connect the returning veterans with the services to assist in  
34 the successful transition from the battlefield to the homefront.

35 (m) Each year, since the current conflicts began, 30,000 military  
36 men and women are discharged from military service in California  
37 and it is beneficial and cost effective to the state to provide these  
38 new veterans assistance in navigating the myriad of federal, state,  
39 local, nonprofit, and private sector service provider benefits and  
40 services for which they are eligible.

(n) The goal of Operation Welcome Home is to reduce veterans' homelessness, decrease veterans' unemployment rates, increase participation in federal veterans programs, such as federal unemployment benefits, compensation, and pension programs, increase the number of veterans in California colleges and universities, increase early detection of mental illness, such as post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, and divert veterans from the criminal justice system.

(o) The goals of Operation Welcome Home necessitate an increased utilization of the county veterans service officers, who are the interface between the state and counties with the veteran's community.

(p) As a result, the Governor's budget proposed to increase local assistance to Operation Welcome Home and the county veterans service officers from two million six hundred thousand dollars (\$2,600,000) to eleven million dollars (\$11,000,000), the full amount allowed by Senate Bill 419.

(q) The Legislature approved an increase in local assistance from two million six hundred thousand dollars (\$2,600,000) to seven million six hundred thousand dollars (\$7,600,000) in recognition of the fact that county veterans service officers not only fulfilled the moral obligation of assisting our veterans but also that in the last 15 years, the county veterans service officers have brought three billion dollars (\$3,000,000,000) in new, unencumbered federal moneys into the state for a modest expenditure by the state of thirty-four million dollars (\$34,000,000) in local assistance.

SEC. 2. Section 972.3 is added to the Military and Veterans Code, to read:

972.3. Notwithstanding any other law, the sum of seven million three hundred thousand dollars (\$7,300,000) is hereby appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide for veterans' services, in accordance with the following schedule:

(a) Two million four hundred thousand dollars (\$2,400,000) for disbursement to the counties in accordance with the existing procedures established under Section 972.1.

(b) Two million dollars (\$2,000,000) for disbursement to the counties for grants for veterans' services.

- 1 (c) Two million three hundred thousand dollars (\$2,300,000)
- 2 for use in Operation Welcome Home or its successor program.
- 3 (d) Six hundred thousand dollars (\$600,000) for grants to
- 4 nonprofit organizations such as veterans' service organizations
- 5 and community-based organizations.

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